

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE THOMAS S. GATES
BEFORE THE
JACKSON COMMITTEE ON POLICY MAKING MACHINERY
June 13, 1960

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

In common with a great many others, I have followed with interest the hearings you have been conducting to explore the organizational machinery now employed within the government to reach policy decisions and to plan for the future. An objective review of policy-making machinery is most useful and constructive, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss the subject with you this morning.

In the letter inviting me to appear before this committee, Mr. Chairman, you directed my attention specifically to two questions.

The first question is: "Is the Department of Defense now properly organized to discharge its responsibilities adequately today and in the years lying ahead? If not, what changes are desired?"

In my judgement, the Department of Defense has at present a sound basis of organization within which it can discharge its responsibilities. An organization as large and complex as the Defense Department is always subject to administrative improvement. In the future the emergence of new problems, new concepts causing a shifting of emphasis in procurement and research, and the ideas contributed by successive administrators all could indicate changes in both structure and operation desirable. Since weapons

-2-

technology and military strategy are undergoing a continuous and increasingly rapid evolution, there probably never can be an ideal or permanent solution. A primary need, therefore, will always be flexibility, to be used as necessary to meet changing requirements.

Certain major changes were made with the adoption of the Reorganization Act of 1958. It is too soon to completely evaluate these, or to determine whether others are needed. One of them, the creation of the position of Director of Defense Research and Engineering, has already proved to be of great benefit and had made a major imprint on our operations. The centralizing of authority in one office, empowered to make certain that maximum use is being made of our resources for research in all military services -- people, facilities and dollars -- was a forward step, of significant importance.

The streamlining of the line of command from the Commander-in-Chief to the unified and specified commands, eliminating the extra step which formerly involved the Military Departments as executive agents, has proved highly satisfactory, and could be of critical importance in a time of emergency. Other improvements contained in the 1958 Act have been beneficial.

I would suggest no further statutory changes until we have more thoroughly digested this 1958 reorganization and learned, by living with it, of any further changes in the law which might be indicated.

-3-

Meanwhile administrative measures to improve our operations can be taken within the framework of the 1958 Reorganization Bill. I trust it is in order to note certain recent actions of this nature.

Much attention has been focused on the workings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Some people have expressed concern because on some important matters the Chiefs do not reach unanimous agreement, and thus -- it is suggested -- do not give the Secretary of Defense clear, firm unanimous recommendations. Various solutions have been offered by those experienced and those inexperienced in the ways of the military. We are dealing with matters of judgement. We are considering subjects of great complexity. Senior military men of integrity do not compromise their views when they think our national security is at stake. They will have differences of opinion, and it is both natural and helpful to have them.

A procedure was instituted whereby the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense sit with the Joint Chiefs weekly, usually on Monday afternoon, and more frequently if desirable, to discuss major issues. This has produced several important results:

1. We are exposed to the various views as they develop;
2. We have an opportunity to make certain by questioning that there is a basis for evaluating these different views;
3. A better basis is created for a sound decision between two or more possible courses of action;

-4-

4. The time required for making decisions is shortened.

To illustrate this procedure, I can give you this summary of results. There have been, since January 21, six specific issues on which decisions had to be made. These are in addition to a number of other matters for discussion. These issues involved command arrangements, military planning and doctrine, and matters pertaining to the Military Assistance Program. Five of these six decisions were made before the meeting ended, and the other was made within a week. There are others pending of considerable importance, but this is the kind of improvement that can be made through administrative changes in internal procedure.

Another major change we have recently made is the establishment of the Defense Communications Agency. This centralizes control of all our long-haul communications under a single officer, who reports through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense. This should result in improved efficiency of our communications. It is an organizational concept which we shall watch with interest.

The second question specifically asked in your letter, Mr. Chairman, was this: "How can the Secretary of Defense best contribute to making the National Security Council an effective advisory mechanism to the President?"

Mr. Chairman, I should like to emphasize that, in my judgement, the National Security Council is functioning effectively and efficiently as

-5-

an advisory mechanism to President Eisenhower. It has functioned in that manner through all the time I have been exposed to its operations. Since the National Security Council is an advisory group, I am sure each President will use it according to his own way of doing business. I can assure this Committee President Eisenhower participates actively in all Council meetings, the pros and cons of any issue are thoroughly and ably debated at the meetings, and the President himself makes the decisions. All this, in my judgement, is exactly as it should be. Recently, I have read some public comments suggesting that the Council may be too large, suggesting that meetings are conducted in a so-called "mass" atmosphere, suggesting that too much of the essential debate may be taking place at lower staff levels, suggesting that top level discussions become smothered in papers, and suggesting that the Council is somehow insulating the President from so-called "hard facts" and "hard decisions". Frankly, I am at a loss to know the basis for such observations because as far as I am concerned -- and I am a member of the National Security Council -- not one of these suggested criticisms can properly be applied to the current practices of the National Security Council. The size and character of the meetings vary with the agenda. For example, it has been the practice to have experts present when they can be helpful to a discussion in their particular fields. Vitally interested agencies may be represented when they should be informed in detail because their responsibilities are heavily

-6-

involved. I cannot tell this Committee what habits and practices may have prevailed at other times or will prevail in the future; but I do know of my own knowledge that these faults have not existed during my activity with the Council under President Eisenhower.

In my opinion, one can never fully separate the statutory composition of any agency from the personalities of the individuals involved. This applies to the National Security Council, and it applies also to the daily inter-relations of government officials at all levels in the Departments involved. All members of the Security Council, along with the responsible officers and employees in their departments, function smoothly together as a team. To illustrate this, I have known Secretary of State Herter and Under Secretary Dillon for years. I enjoy working with them. The members of the Office of International Security Affairs, that part of the Defense Department most concerned with military matters involving foreign policy, are working closely and smoothly with the Department of State. In an average day there will be several hundred separate contacts between individuals in the two organizations -- by meeting, phone call or exchange of correspondence. Similar contacts are made daily between the State Department and the Military Services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

There is, I think, a common recognition on both sides of the Potomac that most foreign policy issues have major defense connotations, and conversely that even routine military activity may have major foreign

- 7 -

policy implications. In addition to the lessons of experience, professional training programs at the National War College, service war colleges and the Military Assistance Institute are stressing the relationships between political, economic and military factors in our security policies. State Department personnel are attending military schools.

Thus, at the highest political levels, at Washington staff levels and at the country team level planning and implementation of national security policies by Defense personnel reflect increasing integration of political, economic and military considerations. We have long realized that the Defense program cannot be prepared in isolation.

Working relationships between the State and Defense Departments are excellent, and I am told they have never been better.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I know the subject of your inquiry is a broad one. Rather than try to anticipate how best I can contribute, or to cover matters which I know you reserve for executive sessions, I have limited this statement to these few brief comments to provide maximum time for any questions you may wish to address to me.

Thank you.